

# FLATHEAD BEACON

# THE POWER

## NEWS

### County Supports Alternative to Superfund for CFAC

Commission sends letter to EPA asking for site to be designated as 'Superfund Alternative' due to Glencore involvement

BY MOLLY PRIDDY OF THE BEACON

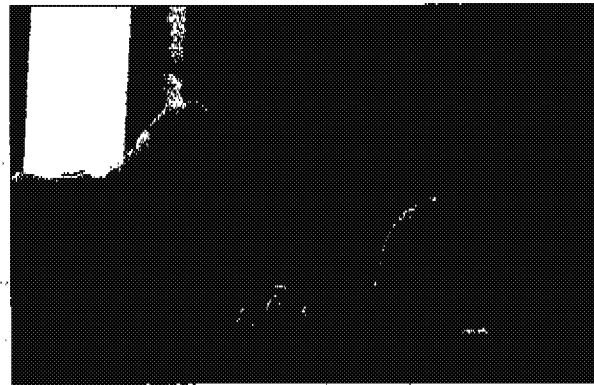
The Flathead County Commission on Jan. 25 approved a letter supporting the alternative plan to a Superfund designation for the shuttered Columbia Falls Aluminum Company.

The letter, addressed to the regional Environmental Protection Agency office in Colorado, expresses the commission's desire to see the CFAC facility cleaned up if need be, but to also avoid the stigma that can brand a community after a Superfund designation.

In the past several months, there have been multiple meetings with CFAC's owners – global conglomerate Glencore – and city, county, state, and federal officials involved.

As a result of the meetings, Glencore agreed to an Administrative Order of Consent which states it will pay for environmental damages. A Superfund listing could still be in the cards, however; Mike Cirian, a regional project manager for the EPA, said last week that agency officials had informed him that any action would take place this fall.

By supporting the Superfund alternative, Commissioner Pam Holmquist said it's a way to begin the cleanup process while giving the valley a chance to avoid a Superfund label.



Flathead County Commissioners Pam Holmquist and Phil Mitchell. BEACON FILE PHOTO

"We don't want it to be a Superfund site unless Glencore quits doing what they're doing," Holmquist said. "Right now, they've stepped up to the plate."

The company, based in Switzerland, doesn't have a solid track record when it comes to working with local governmental agencies. Negotiations broke down between the Glencore and the Department of Environmental Quality in late 2014, only to be resurrected once the push for a Superfund designation happened last year.

The commission made note of the company's reticence to get involved, but then said the monthly

meetings discussing the alternative plan have led to the company the next step of a completed remedial investigation and feasibility study. Holmquist said the company has already invested about \$4 million.

Holmquist also said she has been very impressed with the economic rebuilding and rebranding happening in Columbia Falls, such as building the city's first hotel and other businesses stepping up to create a supportive atmosphere, and that she wouldn't want to preemptively stamp their efforts with a Superfund designation.

As long as Glencore continues to pay and stay involved, Holmquist said she's OK with supporting the alternative plan and protecting the valley and its tourism. The study could also determine the cause and extent of the contamination.

"In reality, they haven't really produced a smoking gun yet, and hopefully if we can give them time with this monitoring, we'll know where the smoking gun is and then we can move forward," Holmquist said.

Holmquist and Commissioner Phil Mitchell signed the letter. Commissioner Gary Krueger was listed as not available for signature since he was on vacation when the letter was sent. When reached on vacation, Krueger said he didn't have an opinion on the letter or its contents because he hadn't seen it.

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